

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

### THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

It is not long since that one of our leading Theological Magazines referred to the subject of the Transfiguration; and in its "Notes of Recent Exposition" opened its issue with these words:

"There is no outstanding event in the life of our Lord so disappointing as the Transfiguration. It seems so great: we get so little out of it. It is not that we do not fathom it. We may not fathom the Temptation. But we get a great deal of meaning out of the Temptation, and we think we understand the purpose of it. Out of the Transfiguration we get very little either for science or edification. Even as to its purpose there is no assurance, though there are many theories."

The Editor then goes on to discuss "two theories": one by Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* (for January, 1903), and the other by the Rev. R. Holmes, in the same Journal, for the following July. The former is the theory "that the Transfiguration was chiefly for the sake of the disciples. It was intended to prepare them for the Resurrection", so that they might see what a glorified body was like, and know the Lord again after He had risen from the dead.

The latter of the "two theories" is that, "by the setting of the Transfiguration, the disciples were taught to surrender their expectations of worldly success, and to enter the Kingdom by the way of the Cross". It was "given to assure them of the crown".

In February, 1904, the Editor of *The Expository Times* returns to the subject and repeats his opening words (quoted above), explaining that—

"The 'we' was neither editorial nor universal. It covered an ordinary experience only. To most ordinary men the Transfiguration seemed to promise much and yield little."

He goes on to consider a third "theory", contained in a volume of sermons by Professor A. B. Davidson in which is one on the Transfiguration. It is "practical". "What trans-

figured Him?" is Dr. Davidson's question, and the answer is: "The external change that passed upon Him was but the reflection of movements in His own mind and heart going on at the moment . . . an indescribable tumultuous crowding of emotions which rushed into His heart." The great thought was love. The glory "was due to the resolution to go to Jerusalem, taken in the act of prayer". The "practical" outcome of this third "theory" is (1) that to see Christ's glory we must go apart with Christ. (2) We must be transfigured by fellowship with Christ, and (3) "Christ took the disciples with Him in order that He might not be alone"; which sounds as if it were an example of modern schoolboy precocity.

All this shows that there is room for another attempt to find a little of what it promises so much; and to find much where it seems to yield so little. There is no reason to doubt or question the conclusions of the editor of *The Expository Times*; and if so, it is all the more urgent that we, and all who believe that every portion of the Word of God was "written for our learning", should seek to learn the great lessons which the Transfiguration was intended to teach us.

However meaningless it may be to the natural man, we are sure that it is full of meaning for the spiritual man.

True, it is super-natural; but though that may be the reason why the natural man may slight, or lightly regard it, it is the very reason why we approach it; being all the more certain that its truth and teaching are also super-natural, and therefore inexhaustible.

One of the great principles which we must first use is to regard the context as absolutely essential to the right understanding of this or any other Scripture. It is not a question of human wisdom or acumen; it is not a matter of reasoning or theory; it is not what man may *think*; but what God has said.

To the context, therefore, let us turn.

The first thing we notice is that the Transfiguration is recorded in three out of the four Gospels. This, of itself, is sufficient to invest the event with special significance; and to impress the words upon us as being of special importance.

In 2 Pet. i. 16, Peter says, by Divine inspiration, that, when he made known to them the Transfiguration he had not followed cleverly-imagined myths. And he goes on to tell them that beside these historic facts which he had conveyed to them

as being what he had himself seen and heard, "we have also the prophetic word [which is] more sure, to which ye do well to take heed in your hearts, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the Day-dawn and the Day-Star arise" (v. 19). This implies that what he had seen in the holy mount, beside being historic, was also "prophetic" of [the] power, even [the] *parousia* or coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or, by the figure *Hendiadys*, the power, yea, coming power, of the Lord Jesus.

In verse 11 Peter had prayed that an entrance into the eternal Kingdom (or sovereignty) of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ might be richly supplied to them; hence he goes on to tell them that the coming Kingdom is a reality, and puts them in remembrance of it (v. 12), and stirs them up to have this in remembrance (v. 15). He then goes on to tell them that he had seen what this coming power was able to do in transfiguring this tabernacle of flesh and blood (v. 16), and clothing it with majesty and honour and glory (v. 17). This is the *application* that Peter makes of the historical facts. There may be others. But what we are in search of is the *Interpretation*; and for this we have to go, as we have said, to the immediate context.

We find the historical facts recorded in three out of the four Gospels (Matt. xvii. 1-8, Mark ix. 1-10, Luke ix. 28-36). And, remembering the "importance of accuracy", we note that in each case it is dated as taking place "after" so many days from some other event. So that this is the first clue we have as to its interpretation. There must be some important reason for thus connecting the Transfiguration with some preceding event. In Matt. and Mark it says "after six days", and in Luke it says after "about eight days". If a question be raised as to this difference, it will be answered by noting that in the former two we have the *present* Tense, "taketh", marking the *commencement* of the event; while in the latter we have the *past* Tense, "having taken", marking the *conclusion* of the event, and adding the word of indefiniteness, "about": implying that the event commenced six days after the preceding event. So that the Transfiguration occupied a part of three days (part of the sixth and eighth, and the whole of the seventh day).

Next, we have to ask, What is that other event from which it is dated; and with which, therefore, it stands, and must be so closely related? We have not far to look, and we find it in the

immediate context. Ignoring the chapter divisions, we find the prior mark of time in Matt. xvi. 21, Mark viii. 30, and Luke ix. 21, where we have the close of the *second* part of Christ's ministry; and in the next verse (of each Gospel respectively) we have the commencement of the *third* part of that ministry.

The *first* part had been occupied with His proclamation of the Kingdom. It commenced in Matt. iv. 17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". It ended in Matt. vii. 28, where we read that "Jesus had ended these sayings".

The *second* commenced in Matt. viii. 1, with the subject of His Person. It begins with the declaration that He was the "Lord" (v. 2), which is repeated in verses 6, 8, and down to verse 20, where we have the first occurrence of the title "Son of man" in the New Testament; and the statement that he was "the Son of God" (v. 29). This second part of His ministry is formally closed in Matt. xvi. 16, where we have an emphatic declaration that He was "the Son of the living God"; and He definitely charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was "the Messiah".

Then, in Matt. xvi. 21, we have the commencement of the *third* part of His ministry. "FROM THAT TIME FORTH began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things," etc. This third part of His ministry was occupied with His *Work*, as the second part had been with his *Person*. It ends in Matt. xxiii. 39, when He formally declares that "henceforth" they should not see Him until He came again in the name of the Lord.

The *fourth* part commences, therefore, with Matt. xxiv. 1: and all that was said and done concerned that coming again, and the change of dispensation which was about to take place. All the parables, as well as the two miracles of this period, were prophetic in their character and teaching.

From all this the great lesson stands out before us, that if we desire to know the interpretation of any of the words or works of the Lord Jesus, we must look for, and find the key in, the subject of that part of the ministry in which they were spoken or done. This being so, and noting the threefold emphasis on the date, we find the first key to the interpretation of the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus in the fact of its close connection with *the first mention of His sufferings*. And here

we notice another fact, and key: the "sufferings" are immediately connected with the coming "glory". The former are mentioned in Matt. xvi. 21, and the future coming in "glory" in verse 27.

Indeed, this reminds us how often we find these two, the "sufferings and the glory", thus closely associated. (See Luke xxiv. 26. 1 Peter i. 11; iii. 18, 22; iv. 13; v. 1; v. 10, 11.) And when we think of the Old Testament, we shall find, if we look, that while the "glory" is frequently mentioned apart from the "sufferings", we never find the "sufferings" mentioned apart from the "glory". (Compare Psalm xxii. 1-21 with 22-31; Psalm cii. 1-11 with 12-28. Isa. liii. 1-10 with 10-12, etc.) If we ask why this is so, the answer is not far to seek. It is a fact and the fact speaks to those whose understandings are enlightened (Eph. i. 18): for, if we listen, we hear it saying: "The glory may well be mentioned apart from the sufferings: for it is independent of them". But the sufferings are the basis of the coming glory. They are the foundation on which it rests. True, the sufferings must take place. It thus "behoved Him to suffer" (Heb. ii. 10. Luke xxiv. 46), He must "needs have suffered" (Acts xvii. 3. Luke xxiv. 26). But *it was not going to end in sufferings*. These were not to be the end of His work. That work was not merely to end in the Cross and the grave. The glory is to be the outcome of the sufferings. This is the reason why the "sufferings" must never be mentioned without the "glory" being declared. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" This is the great question that their association asks and answers; and this is why we find the first reference to the Lord's "sufferings" in Matt. xvi. 21, Mark viii. 31, and Luke ix. 22, immediately followed (1) by the announcement of the "glory", in xvi. 27, Mark viii. 38, and Luke ix. 26; and (2) by the manifestation of that "glory" in the Transfiguration which took place exactly six days after it.

It is this coming "glory", exhibited in the Transfiguration, which is thus referred to in the prophetic words: "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they shall have seen the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 28). It was this coming glory which Peter made known when he told them how he was an eye-witness of it (2 Peter i. 16). Peter, James, and John were the "some"

who were "*standing there*"; and, before they could taste death, yea, within "six days" they saw the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom". They saw, as Peter declares, "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ", and thus the prophetic word was made "more sure". They saw an exhibition of what that glory will be; for, there was the Lord Himself, transfigured before them, and they "were eye-witnesses of His Majesty". There was Moses who had been raised from the dead (compare Deut. xxxiv. 6 with Jude 9): there was Elijah who had been caught up without dying; together forming a glorious manifestation of what the fulfilment of the more sure prophetic word (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17) will be like. As Moses was raised before Elijah was caught up, so will the dead in Christ be first raised; and then, "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air"—not on a "holy mount" on earth, but into the air, so to be for ever with the Lord, and to behold His glory.

The prophetic "six days" will soon have run their course. The seventh day will come; and the eighth will see the prophetic word accomplished. Verily it will be true of some who will be then "standing here" who shall not taste of death till they see the coming of this power and glory. Those who shall have "tasted death" will have a glorious resurrection. They will not be left behind. Those who shall be "standing here" will not get before them; but both will be "caught up TOGETHER" (1 Thess. iv. 17).

Thus the prophetic word of the Lord in Matt. xvi. 28 will have a glorious fulfilment. Those whose understandings are now enlightened (Eph. i. 18) shall not only see that fulfilment in that future day of glory, but they understand His words even now. While those, alas, who have only the folly of human wisdom have their "understanding darkened" (Eph. iv. 18), and see in the Lord's words (Matt. xvi. 28) a false promise, and a statement made, which, they say, was never fulfilled. For, say they, "they did taste of death, and the Son of man has not yet come": even so will it be, yea it is so now; for mockers still deride the more sure prophetic word, and ask "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter iii. 4.)

But there is more in the Transfiguration than this. This is the interpretation of the historic facts and words, so far as it is supplied by the immediate and nearer context. There still

remains the Spiritual application which we are to gather from the remoter context. We have not yet exhausted the former, or touched the fringe of the latter.

#### THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

WE have seen the historical association of the "sufferings and the glory" of Christ in His Transfiguration. We have now to consider their spiritual association, and the deeper truths to be learnt from it.

The first clue to the more spiritual association of the "sufferings" and the "glory" is given us in 2 Peter i. 17, where a circumstance is revealed which is not mentioned in the historic record. We are told

(1) What was *seen* (v. 16, 17).

(2) What was *heard* (v. 18).

It was on "the Holy Mount" that the Lord "received from God the Father glory and honour". This is the recorded historical fact. But why should the Lord have received this "glory and honour" from the Father at that particular time?

In the prophetic words of Psalm viii. 5, this "glory and honour" is associated with the first mention of His name as "the Son of Man", and with His future "dominion" in the Earth. This is declared to be in His Incarnation and humiliation; and in His being made "a little lower than the angels". But the Psalm does not carry us further. We have to turn to Heb. ii. 8, where we have a further revelation, and are told that something had happened to delay this putting all things under His feet. "We see NOT YET all things put under Him." Why do we not see this? Why do we "not yet" see the "Son of Man" exercising this dominion on the earth, and "sitting on the throne of His glory"?

Ah! there was the cross to be borne before the crown could be worn. There were the "sufferings" to be endured before the "glory" could be displayed. The foundation for the eternal glory of His people "must needs" be laid. *His* glory was complete and secure apart from His sufferings; but not so *our* glory. Before our glory can be entered on we must know "the fellowship of His sufferings", and be "made conformable to Him in His death". All this "must needs" be before we can know "the power of His resurrection" (Phil. iii. 10). Hence it is written, "But now we see NOT YET all things put under Him.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels (for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour), that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man". That is to say (noting the parenthesis), the Lord was made "a little lower than the angels" that He might die ("taste of death"); but "was crowned with glory and honour on account of the suffering of death". Thus, again, we have the "glory and honour" associated with the "sufferings" of Christ.

The two Scriptures (Heb. ii. 8 and 2 Peter i. 17), supplement each other. In the former we are not told where or when this crowning took place; but we are told *why*. It was for the "suffering of death". In the latter we are not told why, but we are told *when*, and *where*. It was "on the Holy Mount", when He was Transfigured in glory. But we have not yet discovered the reason for this connection of His crowning, and receiving of glory and honour, with the "sufferings" of Christ. To find this reason we must go to the still remoter context of Exodus xxviii., for there we meet once again with these two words (in the Septuagint) rendered "glory and beauty". The close connection is by this rendering disguised. Had these two words been rendered "honour and glory", as in the Gospels and Epistle, we should have had our attention called to this context. Now that it is called to it, we notice that Ex. xxviii. is occupied with the *Consecration of the High Priest*. We read the instruction given to Moses: "Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother *for honour and for glory*. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, *that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office*" (Ex. xxviii. 2, 3). These last words are repeated from the first verse in order to impress us with what was the one great object of Aaron's consecration as High Priest.

Have we not here the key to the understanding of the object of investing the Lord Jesus on the Holy Mount? not with any earthly or man-made garments of honour and glory, but with honour and glory themselves; His garments made "exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark ix. 3). And He received them, not from the hands of Moses, the brother; but from God, the Father. And yet, for the self-same object: "*that He may minister unto Me in the priest's office*".



Thus, we at length learn that the Transfiguration was no mere capricious or unmeaning event, to dazzle the eyes of those who witnessed it, but it was the official and formal consecration of the Lord Jesus as High Priest, for His work and ministry which he had just announced in the first mention of His sufferings. Here was the first mention of His "suffering": here also was His inauguration for it. Here was the announcement of His high Priestly ministry: here also was his consecration for it. Here was the first prophetic word as to the coming "glory": here also was the exhibition, and type, and token of it.

But are there no further evidences as to the truth of our conclusion in the nearer context? Truly there are. Not only before the Transfiguration were those sufferings the subject of revelation, but on coming down from the Holy Mount they are again the recorded subject of conversation (Matt. xvii. 12, 22, 23; Mark ix. 30-32; Luke ix. 43-45). The Transfiguration itself took place "as He prayed". Now we have only two recorded subjects concerning which the Lord Jesus prayed. We often read that He went "to pray", and that "He prayed", but only two subjects of His prayers are recorded during His ministry, viz. the two that are here associated: the "sufferings" in Gethsemane; the "glory" in John xvii, 1, 5, 24; and both, in John xii. 27, 28. Either or both of these subjects would accord with all else that is connected with the Transfiguration. If He prayed concerning His "sufferings", here was His consecration for them. If He prayed concerning "the glory that should follow", here was the pledge and the proof and the power of it all; for here, in the "sufferings", was the foundation on which the "glory" was to rest.

Not only before and after, but also during the Transfiguration, His sufferings and death formed the sole recorded subject of conversation between Himself and Moses and Elijah. They "appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31).

In connection with this there are two important points raised. The word rendered "decease" is ἐξοδος (*exodos*). It is a remarkable word to use of his death. Its use is intended to contrast His own wondrous work with that of Moses who led forth the People of Israel (as well as consecrated Aaron). That was an Exodus; but this, in virtue of His precious blood, will be an Exodus worthy of the name. For He will not only

lead the Tribes of Israel back to their land of Promise, but He will lead forth a great multitude which no man can number; beside gathering unto Himself the whole Church of God. We see therefore why the ordinary word for *death* is not used. It is a pity therefore that it should have been rendered "decease". Wyclif had "going out", which is much better. The R.V. gives "decease" also, but suggests "*departure*" in the margin. But both versions miss the point of the verb, which is λέγω (*legō*) *to relate*, or *narrate*: i.e. they did not merely hold converse concerning that Exodus, but they *declared* it, and *related* its various steps and events to the three eye-witnesses; as well as made the formal announcement of it all, showing that all was foreseen. His actual "decease" was, of course, included in it; for that was the first event in that Exodus. But it was only the first. There was not only His death to be revealed; but Resurrection and Ascension, and His coming again were to follow, and be made known. By the use of the word "*exodos*" all these events were included in it. There is a further reference to this in 2 Peter i. 15, where this same word is used of Peter's own decease. But what he says is: "I will endeavour that ye may be able after my *exodus* to have these things always in remembrance". What are "these things", but "the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 11). For that entrance, the putting off of his earthly Tabernacle which the Lord had showed him (John xxi. 18) was only the first event. Resurrection and Ascension were to follow. Hence he goes on immediately (in the verses which follow) to refer to the glories revealed on the Holy Mount, when the Lord's *Exodus* was declared to them; and to "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when, like Moses, he would be raised from the dead, and be for ever with the Lord, with whom he loved to be, when he there desired to make the three Tabernacles, and remain in the glory.

There is an echo of this word in 1 Peter ii. 24, where we are told of Christ bearing "our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having been delivered from our sins might live unto righteousness". Here, in the word ἀπογίνομαι (*apoginomai*), *brought out from*, there is a beautiful reference to departure by *exodus*; no longer living in sin, but *brought out* from it, and living again in newness of life—resurrection life—as risen with Christ. Thus in 1 Peter ii. 24 and 2 Peter i. 15, we have two

references to the *Exodos* which was described to the three apostles on the Holy Mount.

Moreover His death (as the first event in that *Exodos*) was not merely an event that was to happen to Him, but it was part of a work which He was about to “accomplish”. No man took His life from Him, but he laid it down of Himself. Till He chose to do this it was said again and again, “His hour was not yet come”. (John vii. 30; viii. 20; xii. 23; xiii. 1; Matt. xxvi. 45.) When, therefore, that hour came, we may be sure that it was the right hour, which man had no power either to hasten or delay. No; “He was about to accomplish” the work: and, if so, we may be perfectly certain that He did accomplish it, and finish it, so that there was nothing left for Himself or any one else to do. It was so perfect that nothing could be put to it or taken from it that could in the slightest degree affect its infinite perfection and completeness. But there is more than this in the word. It is πληρῶω (*plēroō*) to fulfil. Not only did the Lord *accomplish* and *finish* the work which was given Him to do; but, in doing it, He would *fulfil* all that was written of Him in the Scriptures of truth.

Oh, what a glorious *Exodos* it was which He “accomplished”. Every counsel of God was confirmed; every prophecy was fulfilled; and every one of His redeemed was brought out. If it could be said of the *Exodos* from Egypt: “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed” (Ex. xv. 13), how much more could this be declared of Christ on the Holy Mount?

In the *accomplishment* of this *Exodos* there was no haste, no delay, no hesitation, no impatience; but all was done in solemnly ordered and defined exactness from first to last. How different from an ordinary death. How different from that of John the Baptist that preceded it; and from that of Stephen which followed. Both were “precious” in God’s sight; but they were not *necessary* to His counsels or His plans, as Christ’s death was. John died in secret, the victim of the vile passions of a wicked woman; Stephen died in haste, the victim of the wrath of a misguided rabble.

What a contrast to the *Exodos* “accomplished” by our Lord. They were disposed of by the passions of men; but the Lord “accomplished” the counsels of God. There was no chance about it; no contingency. All was “ordered and sure”.

But there is more than this in the spiritual application; there is the utterance of the Divine formula of Consecration, if we may so term it, in the "Voice from Heaven". There was something "heard", as well as "seen". When He was consecrated at His Baptism for His office of Prophet, and the proclamation of the Kingdom, there was the same "Voice from Heaven saying: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. iii. 17). When He was consecrated at His Transfiguration for His office of Priest, and the sufferings of the Cross, there was a "Voice" which came from the overshadowing cloud, saying "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Hear ye Him" (Matt. xvii. 5. Mark ix. 7. Luke ix. 35. 2 Peter iii. 17, 18). And when God bringeth again His first-begotten into the world, and consecrates Him for His office of King, He will say: "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee . . . And let all the Angels of God worship Him" (Ps. ii. 7; Heb. i. 5, 6).

In Heb. v. 5 it is clearly stated, of the office of Priest, that "No man taketh this HONOUR unto himself, but he that is called of God, as Aaron was. So, Christ also GLORIFIED not Himself to be made an High Priest; but He [glorified Him] who said unto Him "Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee". Here we have the same association of "honour" and "glory" in connection with the Consecration of Christ; and we have the use of this same Divine formula in the "Voice from Heaven", at, and in connection with the Transfiguration.

Resurrection marked the completion of His office of Priest on Earth, and its transference to Heaven, where He is "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec", until He is "brought again" into the world. Then He will be a "Priest upon His throne" (Zech. vi. 13). This change is marked by a double consecration; the one on earth, in Heb. v. 5, and the other in Heaven, in Heb. v. 6. Hence, the Holy Spirit connects Christ's consecration as King (Ps. ii. 6, 7) with His resurrection (Acts xiii. 33); because, resurrection is the pledge of the future glory of the Royal-Priest, Melchi-sedec, King of Salem, King of righteousness, King of peace.

Thus the historic interpretation of the Transfiguration takes its proper place in Christ's mission and ministry on earth: a place as important as any other part of His great work of Redemption. It was not a mere event which happened, or

which could have been dispensed with; but it was absolutely necessary for the completeness of the work which he was to "accomplish". We have seen what its place and object was, as gathered from the nearer and remoter contexts. It was the Consecration of the Lord Jesus, "that He might minister unto God in the Priest's office" (Ex. xxviii. 1-3). Hence it was immediately associated with the first mention of His "sufferings", because those sufferings were themselves at once the basis and the pledge of "the glory that should follow".

Every circumstance, and every word connected with that wondrous event in the Gospels and the Epistles, confirms this twofold conclusion, and causes us to feel that we are following "no cunningly-devised fables" when we thus use it to set forth "the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ".

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

It remains for us now to add a few words by way of practical conclusion to the results of our study of the Transfiguration; and very practical they are: for we do not evolve them out of our own imagination, but from the sure words of Holy Scripture.

We gather them from the fact that the verb rendered *transfigure* in the historic record is used twice in our own Church Epistles. The *application*, therefore, is Divine in its origin. Hence it does not affect the *Interpretation* of the Transfiguration, either as to its circumstances or designs; and it is in the fullest possible harmony with what is specially written for, and addressed to, all the members of the Church of God, the One Spiritual Body of Christ.

The verb is μεταμορφῶ (*metamorphōō*) to change the external form, transform, transfigure. It is from this we have our Anglicized word *metamorphosis*. The verb occurs in only two other places in the New Testament; in neither of which, unfortunately, is it rendered *transfigure*, as in the Gospels. In Rom. xii. 2 it is rendered *transformed*; and in 2 Cor. iii. 18 it is rendered *changed*. But, if we bear in mind that in each case it is the same word used of the *Transfiguration* of our Lord, we have a connecting link between the Historic Interpretation, its Spiritual Application, and its Practical Conclusion.

The history in the Gospels is the key to the *interpretation* of the Doctrine in the Epistles; and the interpretation of the

two passages in the Epistles becomes the spiritual *application* of the event recorded in the Gospels.

Let us look at the two passages in the order in which they are presented to us.

#### ROM. xii. 2.

The chapter begins "I beseech you, therefore, brethren". What is the force of this word "therefore"? The Structure of the Epistle shows that Rom. xii. 1 is the continuation of Rom. viii. 39—the Dispensational chapters, ix.—xi., separating (parenthetically) the practical portion from the doctrinal. As some take ch. xii. to be the continuation of ch. xi. and thus are forced to interpret ch. xi. and the Olive Tree of the Church of God, it may be well to give—

#### THE STRUCTURE OF ROMANS.

- A | i. 1-6. Introduction. The Gospel; always revealed: never  
| hidden.
- B | i. 7-15. Epistolary.
- C | a | i. 16—viii. 39. Doctrinal (Church of God).  
    b | ix.—xi. Dispensational (Jew and Gentile).
- C | a | xii. 1—xv. 7. Practical (Church of God).  
    b | xv. 8-12. Dispensational (Jew and Gentile).
- B | xv. 13—xvi. 24. Epistolary.
- A | xvi. 25-27. Conclusion. The Mystery; always hidden: never  
| before revealed.

From this it will be seen that our passage (Rom. xii), corresponds with, and is the continuation from chap. viii. 39, of the subject of the Church of God; and that chap. xii. is the Practical Exhortation, based on the Doctrinal foundation of chap. viii.

The member marked "b" is thus, virtually, a parenthesis between "a" and "a". The word "therefore" connects the two, and shows that true *practice* is the necessary outcome of true *doctrine*.

Seeing, therefore, your standing in Christ; that you are complete in Christ; and, that there is *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ (Rom. viii. 1), and no *separation* from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. viii. 39)—"THEREFORE, I beseech you, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice: living, holy, well-pleasing to God, [which is] your reasonable service; and be not fashioned according to this world (Gr. age), but be ye *transfigured* by the renewing of your mind, with the view to your proving [by a blessed trial]

what the will of God is—that good, and well-pleasing, and perfect [will]”.

We cannot fail to trace and see the real and close connection of these words with the Transfiguration. For it was *there* that our Lord Himself presented His body, while yet alive, as “a living sacrifice!” It was on “the holy mount” that He proved how good, how well-pleasing it was to do that will of God. He had said “I delight to do Thy will, O my God”. And now that the moment had arrived for doing it, He proved that it was good and perfect: and he was Transfigured. At once He received the crown of “glory and honour” in token of the Father’s acceptance of “the living sacrifice”; and the “Voice from Heaven” announced the fact of the Father’s good pleasure. It was indeed an offering of “sweet savour”. It was the meal offering aspect of the Lord’s death; as “the whole burnt offering” was the aspect set forth by “the death of the Cross”.

How exquisite and beautiful is the transition to ourselves, and the reckoning that, if we are in Christ, the logical outcome is that we also find and prove that good and perfect will of God in the same way: by presenting our bodies “as a living sacrifice”, as He did. The ground of our being thus exhorted is that we are *already* “in Him”. The exhortation is not given that we are to do anything in order to be saved, but that we are to do this because we are saved, and because it is the logical effect and result of our perfection and completeness in Christ.

If this be our standing before God, then we cannot logically fashion our walk according to the fashions of this age; but, having the spiritual mind, or New nature (Rom. viii, 6), this will lead us to the holy mount. There we shall experience “the renewing of our mind”, and shall “behold His glory”: and when we are thus “with Him in the holy mount”, we shall say with Peter, “Master, it is good for us to be here”. We shall find no place on earth so “good”. Our New nature will be happy nowhere else; it will be constantly reaching forth to, and be set upon “the things above”. This renewing of our mind by the heavenly atmosphere, and the constant breathing this mountain air of “the holy mount”, will so improve our spiritual health and increase our spiritual strength, that we too shall be so transfigured that others will “take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus”. If we do not thus reckon what our logical service is to be, then we shall be occupied with “the

things on the earth;" and we shall find ourselves walking according to the fashions of this world. And while, it may be, we think and talk much of, and pride ourselves on, our *non-conformity* with a Church, we are all the time becoming more and more "conformed to this world". Oh that we might rightly reckon and govern all by the force of this word "therefore": and, seeing we are eternally safe and secure in Christ, we might be henceforth occupied with Him, and remain with Him "in the holy mount".

This application is still further emphasized in the other passage where the verb occurs.

2 COR. iii. 18.

Here we have the same Moses, but another "holy mount", even "Horeb, the mount of God".

Moses had been there with God: and he had already begun to be transfigured, physically, by the power of that glory which he beheld. When he came down from the mount his face shone with the reflection of that glory. Even so shall we one day be physically transfigured, for "when He shall appear we shall be like Him". Why? "for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2). So is it, and so even will it be, psychically, now, in proportion as we are "with Him in the holy mount", and behold His glory now, as in a mirror which reflects it on our countenance and makes it shine with a spiritual and heavenly radiance.

Moses, whenever he was in the Mount of God, was there with unveiled face. It was only when before the people that he put on the veil. It is even so now; the world wants us to wear a veil. It cannot endure any of the reflection of the heavenly glory. It would like us to wear a veil, so as to hide our light. It does not find it "good" to be even in our poor reflection of that glory. But when we are, as Moses was, "with Him", then, like Moses "with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror", we find that glory which shines upon us is reflected by us, and we ARE transfigured into the same image, from the glory [above] to the glory [below], even as from the Lord [Christ who is] spirit, shining upon us here and causing us to reflect it on others. Moses could not see the shining of his own face: neither can we see ours. But others can see it; and, while some will "take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus", others will see it, and hate us.



Thus are the two passages so closely related that their teaching intertwines; the one supplements the other. If, in looking at the former passage (Rom. xii. 2), we are overwhelmed by the solemnity of the exhortation and ask: How am I to be transfigured? What am I to do? What step am I to take? How am I to set about so seemingly impossible a task? Then the answer comes to us from the latter passage (2 Cor. iii. 18); and, as such an exhortation could not be called "practical" unless it were practicable, we find that we are to be transfigured by simply "beholding-as-in-a-mirror the glory of the Lord" (*i.e.*, the LORD'S glory).

There is no work to be done to accomplish this "change". It is simply "we beholding . . ." There is no anxious effort; no restless toiling; no rushings hither and thither from convention to convention; no listening to this teacher or that, but merely "we, beholding". That is all. If such a condition of perfection were to be reached only by the observance of "rules for daily living", and the following a "directory of a devout life", we might well despair. Even if we succeeded for a time, the work would have to be done over and over again. Like the priests of old, we should have to "stand daily" and "continually" at this work. But, thank God, in this heavenly sphere all is "rest". Christ is "seated and henceforth expecting".

"As He is, so are we in this world" (Heb. x. 13).

Our hope is set upon Him (1 John iii. 3); our "heart is fixed" on Him; our minds are "set upon the things above", and thus, beholding . . . BEHOLDING . . . BEHOLDING . . . WE ARE TRANSFIGURED. It does not say, as some teach us, that then we must "try and be changed". "We ARE changed".

When we behold ourselves in an Eastern mirror of burnished metal we see our face; but, while we do so, there is the *reflection of the mirror* on our own countenance. If it be a mirror of polished silver, then that reflection will be white, and others will see that white reflection on our face. If it be of burnished copper or gold, then it will be a yellow reflection on our face that will be seen. Even so while we are beholding Christ with the eye of faith; and are occupied with Him; and have "our minds set on the things above"; then, while we behold something of the glory of His Person, and of His Work, and of His Word, there will be the blessed reflection of all this not only on our countenance, but in our life, and walk, and conversation.

## GOOD TO BE THERE

There is just one other point of great practical value. The Lord [Christ] who is the *pneuma*, or spirit, which animates the written Word, and gives it life in our experience (2 Cor. iii. 18), will also surely make "the prophetic word more sure", and will quicken our hopes and desires for the coming day of "Glory", of which the Transfiguration was so grand a pledge.

If in the manifested glory of that day the three disciples were constrained to exclaim, "Master, it is good for us to be here", we, too, may truly say—resting on the sure prophetic Word which tells us of the day when we "shall appear with Him in glory",—Master, it will be good for us to be THERE.

And if that blessed One took the three up into the Holy Mount, in the fulfilment of His promise that they should see His glory before they tasted death, so surely will He make good His own prophetic word (1 Thess. iv. 15–17); and whether we "taste of death", or "are alive and remain", shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord.

This is "that blessed hope" of "the Church which is His body". The members wait to be united with the Head. We wait to be "received up in glory". We wait for resurrection (like Moses), or for ascension (like Elijah); or for both at once, as foretold and promised in 1 Thess. iv. We wait for these bodies of humiliation to be raised, and made like Christ's own glorious body (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

If the Transfiguration was a sample, or type, of the power and coming (*i.e.*, the coming power) of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it was (2 Pet. i. 16), then we may see in it a representation of the moment of the Transfiguration of His church; when He will come "to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 10). This will be the manifestation of His "power" in fashioning our bodies of glory; that power by which He will subdue all things to Himself (Phil. iii. 21). It will be the "power" manifested at His "presence" with us in the air (for the word is *parousia* in 2 Pet. i. 16). It will be before our manifestation or "appearing TOGETHER WITH Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4).

It will be before His apocalypse when He shall come with His mighty angels (the angels of His power) in the flaming fire of

judgment (2 Thess. i. 7). Before that moment arrives we and the whole Church of God shall be "at rest" with Him. For He "shall have been" already glorified in His saints before His revelation in the fires of judgment. This is the force of the word rendered "shall come" in 2 Thess. i. 10. It is not the simple Future Tense Indicative, but it is the Second Aorist Subjunctive, and can only mean *shall have come*. Through not noticing the tense of the verb here, many have been cruelly misled into supposing that the saint's rest will not have come until after Christ's revelation in judgment; and hence that they will have to pass into or through the great tribulation. No, we have a more "blessed hope" than that. We have the hope of a glorious *Exodus*. An Exodus which, though it may include death, includes also Resurrection, Ascension, Transfiguration, and Manifestation in glory. For having first been "received up in glory" BY Christ, we shall shine forth WITH Christ when He is revealed to remove the curse from a groaning creation.

When the three disciples descended from "the holy mount" they found the devil in possession; but saw the usurper ejected by the power of the Lord. Even so will it be when we shall appear and shine forth with Him, and shall come with Him "in His glory". Not as in the earthly days of the Son of Man, when He came down to suffer: but when He shall come down to "sit upon the throne of His glory" (Matt. xxv. 31). Then, "as the lightning shineth out of the one part—under heaven—and shineth unto the other part—under heaven; so also shall the coming of the Son of man be in His day" (Luke xvii. 21–24). Yes! those will be "the days of the Son of Man" when He shall come to exercise "dominion" in the earth (Ps. viii. 4–6). Days of "glory and honour", not days of humiliation and shame. Days, when on His head shall be "a golden crown" (Rev. xiv. 14), and not "a crown of thorns" (Mark xv. 17). Days when He shall put in His sharp sickle and reap the harvest of the earth; that earth on which He once had not where to lay His head (Matt. viii. 20). Those will be "the days of the Son of Man". But before then we shall have known something of the days of "the Son of God". As Son of man we shall come with Him to the earth: but as Son of God we are to be first "caught up to meet him in the air". It may be that "some standing here" will soon see the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The "six days" will soon run their course. On the seventh we

shall be "at rest" with Him: but the "eighth" day will come, and then we shall descend with Him from the holy mount, and Satan will be cast out from a "lunatic and sore-vexed" world. The disciples could not cast out the devil from that lunatic, and they were surprised at their failure. They asked "Why could not we cast him out?" (Matt. xvii. 14-18). Ah! it required the Lord's own power. None but He could do it then; and none but He can do it now. The Churches may try, but will try in vain to bring in a Millennium without Christ. It was then truly said—"Thy disciples could not cure him"—so it will be said of disciples to-day. The Lord Himself must descend from heaven. He alone can heal this sin-sick world; and cause the groans of creation to cease.

"O, what a bright and blessèd world  
This groaning earth of ours will be,  
When from its throne the tempter hurled,  
Shall leave it all, O LORD, to Thee!

But brighter far that world above  
Where we, as we are known, shall know;  
And, in the sweet embrace of love,  
Reign o'er this ransomed earth below.

O, blessèd Lord! with longing eyes,  
That blissful hour we wait to see;  
While every worm or leaf that dies  
Tells of the curse, and calls for Thee.

Come, Saviour! then, o'er all below  
Shine brightly from Thy throne above;  
Bid heaven and earth Thy glory know,  
And all creation feel Thy love."

"EVEN SO; COME, LORD JESUS."